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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 MEXICO 001845

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SUBJECT: NARCO-VIOLENCE SPIKES AGAIN

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Charles V. Barclay. Reason:
1.4 (b), (d).

Summary

1. (SBU) Mexico's Attorney General's office has provided us figures on Mexico's organized crime related death toll, which reached 3591 as of June 22. This is well on its way to matching or topping last year's record violence. Killings spiked considerably this month with nearly 200 narco-homicides in the week of June 8-14 alone. Despite the on-going strong military presence in Ciudad Juarez (CJ), Chihuahua continued to register the largest number of homicides (1093). The cartels continue to clash with the military and federal police, producing noteworthy losses on both sides. Post law enforcement agencies believe the spike in violence may be partially explained by a series of blows the military and police delivered to the cartels, capturing a considerable number of local bosses in key positions, as well as identifying and arresting officials who had been colluding with drug traffickers. End Summary.

Narco-Death Toll Rises Again

2. (SBU) The recent up-tick in drug related homicides may mark the resumption of a trend that began to take hold in the last three months of 2008 which registered record levels of narco-violence with upwards of 700 - 850 killings per month. By the end of June, the death toll will likely have already surpassed 2007's total of 3,038 (GOM statistic) and -- if the trend continues -- match or surpass last year's record of 6,380 (GOM statistic). Of this year's figures, 16 of the victims were military officials and 187 were state, local or federal law enforcement officials. This marks a drop of military killings from last year.

3. (SBU) Despite the on-going strong military presence in Ciudad Juarez (CJ), Chihuahua continued to account for a significant proportion of the violence with 1,093 killings thus far. Consulate CJ reported a brief period of relative calm following the deployment of additional troops and federal police in March 2009. However, homicides in CJ have begun to increase again despite the publicly presence of between 5000 and 10,000 soldiers in the city at any given time. (Note: The constant number is probably closer to 5,000, with occasional spikes during rotations in and out of the city, according to consulate reporting.) Sinaloa, Guerrero, Michoacan and Durango are the next most troubled states, 352, 319 and 274 killings respectively. (Michoacan and Durango are tied for fourth place.) Durango currently has a smaller military presence than other troubled states,

and an upsurge in cartel fighting in that state could in the future test the reach of President Calderon's strategy of simultaneously deploying troops and federal police to combat criminal violence.

Increased Number of Clashes

14. (SBU) Since our last narco-violence report (MEXICO 000486) there have been a number of clashes between the cartels and the military and police. The most recent confrontations include a two hour fire-fight on May 10 in Tabasco state, the May 16 prison breakout in Zacatecas, the June 6 Acapulco gun fight between the military and members of the Beltran-Leyva Organization and a similar shoot-out in Durango that left three Sinaloa cartel members and one federal policeman dead. As with last fall's series of spectacular battles, these involved cartel members who chose to stand and fight, heavy caliber weaponry and multiple casualties.

Military and Police Deal Heavy Blows to Cartels

15. (SBU) The considerable spike in violence the first half of June comes on the heels of a series of blows the military and police delivered to the cartels, resulting in the capture of a considerable number of local bosses in key positions (and the identification and arrest of compromised officials). In many cases, the authorities had been directed towards their targets by calls from members of the public - some of which are thought to have come from members of rival gangs. Law

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enforcement contacts say that score-settling in June as a result of these takedowns may account for the recent spike. The other explanation that continues to be advanced is that, as cartel members go "down-market" and engage in relatively more petty criminal activities, they are increasingly butting up against rival drug trafficking organizations, as well as other criminal groups. A brief summary of the most important developments follow:

- On May 6 in Apodaca, Nuevo Leon, the army announced the capture of 6 suspected Zetas and the seizure of more than 20 armored vehicles, 12 rifles and fragmentation grenades. That same day, in a town close to Monterey, the army captured 4 gunmen presumed to be bodyguards to Alan Mauricio Saldana, the reputed new boss of the BLO in Nuevo Leon. A military spokesman said that this cartel and the rival Gulf gang have been recruiting traffic police officers as gunmen, because they are not part of the national security system and are therefore under less scrutiny.
- On May 5 a judge in Jalisco state ordered the arrest of 12 members of the military and 6 police officers on charges of collaborating with Los Zetas in the city of Aguascalientes, both as gunmen and extorting protection money on their behalf.
- On May 7 a judge in Quintana Roo indicted the former public security director of Benito Juarez (the municipality covering the resort of Cancun); the director of the Cancun municipal prison and an advisor to the local mayor, as being in the service of the Zetas and involved in the February murder of retired General Mauro Enrique Tello, shortly after he was appointed security adviser in Benito Juarez.
- On May 9 the army reported that Rafael del Angel Velez Morales (Q&el FayoQ8), the presumed leader of the Gulf cartel in the Cancun area, had been captured in Quintana Roo along with seven suspected associates, among them a serving federal police officer. That same day in Santiago, Nuevo Leon, the army arrested Raul Gonzalez Garcia Q&el Rully,Q8 suspected of overseeing the transit of drugs through that state and Tamaulipas for the Gulf cartel. Six of his suspected associates were also arrested.
- On May 18 the Attorney General's Office, PGR, announced that two former top security officials in the state of Morelos had been arrested on suspicion of involvement with organized crime. Also arrested were a police officer and a civilian. That same day in Chiapas authorities announced the

arrest, for similar reasons, of the director of the municipal police of Tapachula, the director of the border police, the former director of Tapachula's municipal police and a police officer serving with the public prosecution service.

-- On May 18, in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, military elements captured Rodolfo Lopez Ibarra, or Q&El Nito, Q8 the suspected leader of the BLO in the region. According to Mexican authorities, Lopez Ibarra replaced Hector Huerta Rios, who was detained in March of this year.

-- On May 22, the military captured alleged Gulf Cartel operative Raymundo Almanza Morales, alias Q&El Gori, Q8 a key lieutenant of the organization who is also listed on the list of Mexico's top 37 most wanted drug traffickers.

-- On June 12, the army captured the alleged leader of the Gulf Cartel in the resort of Cancun, Juan Manuel Jurado Zarzota. Jurado Zarzota -- who was apprehended along with 3 others -- was believed to have taken over control of the group in Cancun after the arrest of its former head in May. He is accused of also being involved in the murder in February of retired general, Mauro Enrique Tello Quinones, who had been employed to tackle corruption in Cancun's police force.

-- On June 13, the navy discovered the largest methamphetamine lab in all of Latin America in Guaymas, Sonora. They found 20,000 liters of water, 50,000 liters of ephedrine, 1,400 liters of gasoline, 3,250 kg of iodine and 1,850 kg of caustic soda, all precursors that could have produced nearly four tons of crystal methamphetamine.

-- On June 14, the army captured 25 gunmen posing as military personnel in the town of Madera, Chihuahua state. Jose Q&El General Q8 Garcia Garcia, the leader of a Sinaloa cartel cell that operates in Guerrero, Sinaloa and Sonora states, was among those arrested.

-- On June 14, the military captured four members of the Gulf cartel in Quintana Roo state, including the cell leader, Juan

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Q&El Puma Q8 Manuel Jurado Zarzoza, who is in charge of operations for the plaza of Cancun.

Crackdown on Corruption

16. (SBU) In addition to the arrests of key regional cartel leaders, on June 17 three officers from the PGR's Organized Crime Investigations Unit (SIEDO) were arrested. These arrests follow those of ten soldiers on June 12 and suggest that there cartel infiltration of federal security forces remains an ongoing problem. PGR began purging SIEDO last year through Q&Operation Limpieza, Q8 which led to the arrest of several senior figures. Two of the SIEDO officers arrested were accused of working for the BLO. The other SIEDO officer was accused of working for a faction of the Sinaloa cartel headed by Ismael Q&El Mayo Q8 Zambada. The 10 soldiers, eight of whom are junior officers, came from a range of regiments. It is not clear which gang SIEDO believes the soldiers were working for. Initially the SIEDO alleged that they were working for Joaquin Q&El Chapo Q8 Guzman, but then later claimed that some were working for Ismael Q&El Mayo Q8 Zambada. (Both Guzman and Zambada are key figures in the Sinaloa gang.) The last army officer accused of working for the cartels was Major Arturo Gonzalez Rodriguez in December 2008. He was accused of taking US\$100,000 a month to pass on military secrets to the BLO.

17. (SBU) Moreover, on May 26, Federal Police and PGR/SIEDO detained ten mayors and other local officials in the state of Michoacan, President Calderon's home state and a long-time locale for the production/transit of drugs. The local officials arrested are believed to have ties to the Q&La Familia Q8 organization, one of multiple cartels operating in the state, including the Gulf Cartel and the Cartel del Milenio organization. The operation was unprecedented in

scope and brought to national attention to the state's pervasive local corruption. In light of this revelation, the NGO MUCD urged other states to investigate other local officials for possible ties to organized crime. The group's director Ana Franco said that it seems to me that there are also governors involved in narco-trafficking and that should also be detained and arraigned. Q8 Indeed, the fallout from the operation may go well beyond those officials already arrested, with reports circulating that dozens more Q* possibly including some federal legislators Q* are currently under investigation and may be indicted for organized crime ties.

18. (SBU) The timing of the operation in the weeks before the mid-term election led to charges by opposition political figures that it was carried out to give an advantage to the PAN, the president's party. While it will never be proven they were timed for electoral advantage, the arrests will likely impact the electoral contest in Michoacan and do indeed fit into PAN's strategy of highlighting its law and order credentials. The electoral atmosphere in Michoacan was already tense, given that the PAN appeared poised to rally in the PRD-governed state. Earlier in May, one poll in the state indicated that 38% of respondents supported the party, while 33% supported the PRD and 24% supported the PRI. Military raids on police stations throughout the state of Nuevo Leon elicited similarly charges by PRI leaders that they were designed to impact the gubernatorial race in that state.

Public Opinion

19. (SBU) Opinion polls indicate that Mexican voters are conflicted about the efficacy of the GOM's strategy. A poll by Mitofsky, for Mexico Unido Contra la Delincuencia (MUCD) -- a vociferous anti-crime NGO -- found that 75% of Mexicans believed that the security situation was either the same or worse than it was 10 months ago, while 24 percent said their family had been a victim of crime as opposed to 18 percent in August 2008. According to the poll, more Mexicans now feared kidnapping (72%) than 10 months ago, when only 68% did. Nevertheless, the same survey shows a five point increase since February in the perception that President Calderon is doing a lot or some to combat insecurity, and 80 percent of respondents said they think the government is right to use the military in the counter narcotics fight. 48% of Mexicans

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think the military operations have been effective against the cartels. This figure is up from 43% in February but down from 54% in November 2008.

Comment

10. (SBU) The arrest of several regional cartel leaders, combined with moves by criminal organizations to consolidate their holds on turf, has contributed to rising levels of narco-violence levels over recent weeks. Law enforcement sources believe the majority of the violence continues to be the result of bitter clashes among the cartels and their supporters, but we have also seen a resurgence of spectacular battles between increasingly aggressive security forces and a well-armed enemy. Visit Mexico City's Classified Web Site at <http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/wha/mexicocity> and the North American Partnership Blog at <http://www.intelink.gov/communities/state/nap/>

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